

Promoting gender equality in academia and research institutions

Main findings



European Institute for Gender Equality

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is the EU knowledge centre on gender equality. EIGE supports policy makers and all relevant institutions in their efforts to make equality between women and men a reality for all Europeans by providing them with specific expertise and comparable and reliable data on gender equality in Europe.

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Main findings



Promoting gender equality in academia and research in the European Union

Over the last 15 years, continuous and cumulative steps have been made to advance gender equality in research and higher education institutions in the European Union (see Figure 1).

Despite these efforts, and although progress can be noticed (as shown by 'She Figures'), there is still work to be done because literature and statistics provide evidence that: research and higher education institutions are gendered settings; unconscious or implicit biases impede an objective and fair judgement when recruiting or assessing people; there is a tendency to associate science with men; female researchers are generally underrepresented (with even lower percentages in typical male-dominated fields and in leadership and senior positions); and much research is gender-blind or gender-biased.

In order to change the current state-of-play and ultimately contribute to the promotion of gender equality in research and higher education institutions, the **European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)**, in cooperation with the **European Commission's Directorate-General for Research and Innovation**, commissioned a project aimed at:

- mapping and analysing the legal and policy frameworks and other stimulatory initiatives promoting gender equality in research;
- identifying good practices for integrating gender equality in research and higher education institutions;
- developing an online tool to assist these institutions in setting up, implementing, monitoring and evaluating gender equality plans.

This project ran from July 2015 until October 2016¹.

A participatory approach was followed throughout the project. A multiplicity of stakeholders and experts across the EU and beyond were involved to:

- ensure that a comprehensive mapping was carried out;
- identify and select good practices promoting gender equality in research and higher education institutions;
- to co-design an online tool that meets the needs of those working in the field.

The **GEAR tool (Gender Equality in Research and Academia)** is the result of multiple contributions, in different stages of the process, covering the 28 EU Member States and beyond.

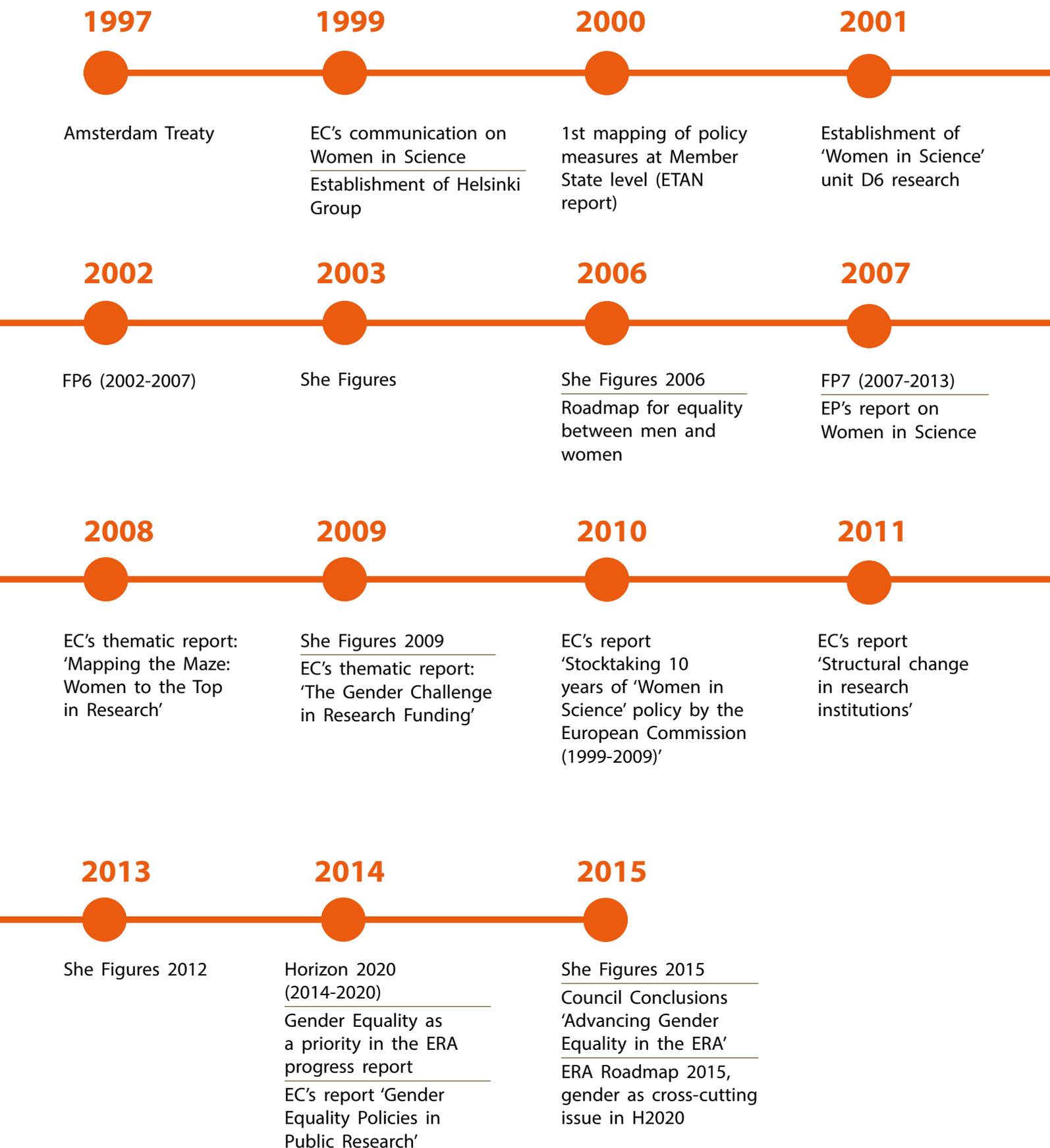
Considering the wealth of information and insights gathered, this publication summarises the main findings of the research and co-creation processes undertaken throughout the project.



¹ The mapping and analytical exercises took place in the autumn of 2015 and covered the period between 2010 and 2015 for all EU Member States.

Figure 1.

Policy efforts towards the promotion of gender equality in research in the European Union



EU objectives for gender equality in research

Three objectives underpin the European Commission's strategy on gender equality in research and innovation policy:

- Fostering equality in scientific careers;
- Ensuring gender balance in decision-making processes and bodies;
- Integrating the gender dimension in research and innovation content, i.e. taking into account the biological characteristics and the social features of women and men.

As laid out in the European Commission's Communication for a Reinforced European Research Area (2012), the EU Member States are encouraged to:

- Create a legal and policy environment and provide incentives to:
 - › remove legal and other barriers to the recruitment, retention and career progression of female researchers while fully complying with EU law on gender equality (Directive 2006/54/EC);
 - › address gender imbalances in decision making processes;
 - › strengthen the gender dimension in research programmes;
- Engage in partnerships with funding agencies, research organisations and universities to foster cultural and institutional change on gender – charters, performance agreements, and awards.
- Ensure that at least 40% of the underrepresented sex participate in committees involved in recruitment/career progression and in establishing and evaluating research programmes.

The Council Conclusions on Advancing gender equality in the European Research Area (adopted in 2015) reiterate the need to foster sustainable cultural and institutional change in the ERA national action plans or strategies at the level of Member States and research institutions.

The Council also invites EU Member States and research funding organisations to provide incentives to encourage higher education institutions and research organisations to revise or develop gender mainstreaming strategies and/or gender equality plans and to mobilise adequate resources.

The Council calls in particular for:

- Guiding targets in decision-making bodies, such as leading scientific and administrative boards, recruitment and promotion committees and evaluation panels, to achieve gender balance in leadership and decision-making positions.
- Guiding targets for a more even gender balance of full professors in higher education institutions.
- Monitoring, with appropriate indicators, the implementation of gender policies, and actions at institutional, national and EU level.
- Gender awareness-raising and capacity-building tools in order to achieve institutional change.
- Flexible and family-friendly working conditions and arrangements for both women and men.
- The review of the assessment of researchers' performance, to eliminate gender bias.

Institutional change (or 'structural change' as known in the past) is a strategy aiming at removing obstacles to gender equality that are inherent to the research system itself and at adapting practices of institutions. Within an institutional change approach, the focus is on the organisation.

In the European Research Area, research and higher education institutions are invited to implement institutional change relating to human resources management, funding, decision-making and research programmes. The main aims of institutional change are to achieve gender equality in staff's representation at all levels of scientific careers and in decision-making processes and bodies, to retain and recognise the potential of both female and male talents, and to promote the integration of the gender dimension in research and innovation content.



Integrating gender equality into academia and research: legal, policy and other stimulatory initiatives in the EU Member States

Legal framework

The purpose of the Directive 2006/54/EC (recast) is to ensure the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation. The Directive contains provisions to implement the principle of equal treatment in relation to: a) access to employment, including promotion, and to vocational training; b) working conditions, including (gender) equal pay, return from maternity, paternity and adoption leave, and sexual harassment; and c) occupational social security schemes. It also contains provisions to ensure more effective implementation by the establishment of appropriate procedures. Although this Directive applies to research and higher education institutions as employers, some EU Member States have developed specific legislation to achieve the overarching objective of mainstreaming gender equality in public research and higher education. By November 2015, 14 EU Member States² had included the overarching objective of integrating gender in public research in their national general equality and/or anti-discrimination legal frameworks (see Figure 2). In most cases, it is the status of higher education institutions and research organisations as public bodies and employers, which determines whether they are explicitly covered by the general equality and/or anti-discrimination legislation. These provisions primarily target equality in the workplace, equal access to decision-making positions and fighting sexual harassment and discrimination. Specific provisions requiring research and/or higher education institutions to implement structured gender equality plans exist only in eight EU Member States³ (see Figure 2).

Policy framework

22 EU Member States⁴ have put in place policies promoting gender equality in research. It was found that a policy framework on the integration of gender in research may exist in countries lacking legal provisions on the same topic. This is the case of Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia. On the other hand, countries with a comprehensive legislative framework, such as Austria, were found not to reflect this into a comprehensive policy framework.

There is a high degree of diversity in the different dimensions covered by these policies and in the intensity of their implementation.

² AT, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GR, IE, IT, LT, PL, SE, UK

³ AT, DE, ES, FI, HU, IT, SE, UK

⁴ AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, PT, SE, SI, SK, UK

In 16⁵ out of 22 Member States where policies are in place, the main focus is on equality in participation in research activities and gender balance in access to management and decision-making positions. In other countries, although these basic dimensions are not covered, other aspects are considered, such as promoting work-life balance (GR), or establishing a partnership between equality and research governance bodies (PT). Policies on the integration of a gender perspective in knowledge production could be identified in three countries (BE, FI and FR), while policies on the integration of a gender dimension in curricula are present in four (BE, FI, HR and SI). Worth noting is that French and Spanish policy documents include specific measures directed at fighting gender-based violence.

Ensuring support (or absence thereof) for the implementation of Gender Equality Plans is also a point of divergence in the policies identified in the EU Member States. Only eight countries⁶ include supportive measures for establishing and implementing Gender Equality Plans. The fieldwork of this project also provided evidence that Research Funding Organisations have increased their involvement in the implementation of policies that promote gender equality in research. Nevertheless, the degree of support still varies considerably among countries.

Other stimulatory initiatives

The most widespread initiative seems to be the L'Oréal-UNESCO awards for female scientists, which has been implemented over the last years by 12 Member States⁷. This practice consists of awarding female senior researchers and granting fellowships to doctoral and post-doctoral researchers. The Athena-SWAN Chart initiative was established in 2005 in the UK with the aim of encouraging and advancing the careers of women in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicines (STEMs). In 2015, the Charter included the research areas of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, Business and Law. Also in early 2015, the Athena-SWAN charter was extended to Ireland. Other stimulatory initiatives have been identified in different EU Member States such as the Charter for Gender Equality in Higher Education and Research in France, or the Charter for More Women in Management and Operation Chain Reaction in Denmark.

⁵ AT, BE, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IT, LT, SE, SI, SK

⁶ BE, CY, DE, FI, PT, SE, SK, UK

⁷ CZ, DK, FI, FR, HR, HU, IT, LV, PL, PT, SI, RO

Domestic frameworks play a role at institutional level

Research and higher education institutions face common challenges as part of the growing Europeanisation and internationalisation of research. Nevertheless, domestic frameworks considerably determine how gender aspects are tackled (or not) in these settings. This diversity can be recognised at the level of legislative frameworks, as well as in policies and other incentives. It is also reflected at the level of research and higher education institutions, in the typology of gender equality strategies and measures they put in place.

Gender Equality Plans in research and higher education institutions in the EU

What is a Gender Equality Plan?

In the specific context of research and higher education institutions, the European Commission considers a Gender Equality Plan as a **set of actions** aiming at:

1. Conducting impact assessment / audits of procedures and practices to identify gender bias;
2. Identifying and implementing innovative strategies to correct any bias;
3. Setting targets and monitoring progress via indicators.

Source: European Commission Communication on 'A Reinforced European Research Area Partnership for Excellence and Growth' (COM(2012) 392 final)

According to the inventory carried out in the framework of this project, over 1,100 research and higher education institutions were implementing Gender Equality Plans in 2015. It is estimated that in total over approximately 1,500 Gender Equality Plans were being implemented in the EU back then. This is because in some institutions, individual departments and research institutes also implement Gender Equality Plans.

Gender Equality Plans are more common in countries where legislation include them as specific legal provisions (see Figure 3). Although they may be set in place in the form of binding legal provisions, Gender Equality Plans are generally categorised as soft policy instruments at the EU level. Despite them being compulsory by law, subsequent processes and measures of adoption and implementation do not entail the same binding nature. This poses challenges to the effective implementation of Gender Equality Plans and hence to the promotion of gender equality in research and higher education institutions.

Internal organisational features have a great impact on the implementation of Gender Equality Plans, such as the resources available, top-management support, capacity to mobilise stakeholders and the different components of the university, as well as decision-making and potential resistances to change. The very objectives of gender equality measures implemented in research and higher education institutions vary depending not only on the status of gender equality within the organisation, but also on its funding, national and international profile, needs in terms of recruitment, audiences and specialisation.

Despite different institutional settings and features, the Gender Equality Plans implemented in research and higher education institutions share some common aspects. The Gender Equality Plans that were more thoroughly analysed for the purpose of this project generally address equality in recruitment, appraisal, career management and access to management positions. On the other hand, a greater or lesser focus is put on work-life balance and other related issues such as building a gender equality culture, preventing sexist language, etc.

Awareness-raising actions are usually planned as part of Gender Equality Plans, although only rarely as part of a broader capacity-building and knowledge transfer strategy. Fighting sexual harassment and gender-based violence, integrating a gender perspective in research and curricula, as well as tackling intersecting inequalities, seem to receive little attention or do not appear to be present at all in many Gender Equality Plans. The lack of monitoring and evaluation instruments, the absence of timelines for implementation and the lack of institutional, human and financial resources to make Plans sustainable are other common features identified.

The Gender Equality Plans developed or enhanced as part of EU-funded institutional change projects are of a distinctive nature. Due to the highly competitive nature and pre-requisites of EU calls, research and higher education institutions applying for EU funding are compelled to build far-reaching, holistic strategies, and to contribute cumulatively to enhance knowledge on gender in research in order to achieve the three objectives set by the European Commission. Evidences of such a qualitative difference were reported for instance in Italy, France or the Netherlands. Additionally, the human and financial resources these EU-funded Gender Equality Plans rely upon enhance their capacity to carry out sophisticated diagnoses and design complex measures, and allow the dissemination of their outputs. The EU-funded institutional change projects and respective Gender Equality Plans also contribute to shaping a community of practitioners driven by common interests, who reveal to be able to act beyond their community.



Figure 2.
 Legal and policy provisions promoting gender equality in research in the EU-28 MS

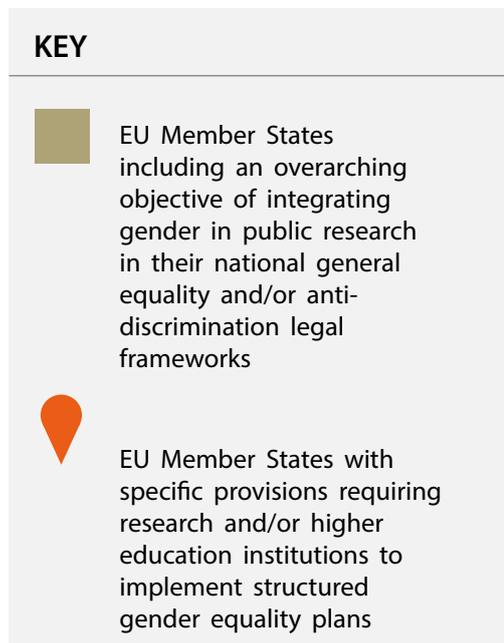


Figure 3.
 Gender Equality Plans and EU-funded institutional change projects in the EU-28 MS



Steps to establish a Gender Equality Plan

Based on the insights gathered and field experience, for a Gender Equality Plan to be successfully implemented, it is important to be aware that each step of the process requires specific types of interventions. In order to ensure the effectiveness and the success of a Gender Equality Plan, the following steps can be identified.

Step 1: Getting started, in which the importance of promoting gender equality is acknowledged and essential information is gathered in order to start establishing the Gender Equality Plan.

Step 2: Analysing and assessing the state-of-play of the institution, in which the national (or regional) legal and policy backgrounds are analysed; sex-disaggregated data is collected and processed; procedures, processes and practices are critically assessed with a view to detect gender inequalities and gender bias in the institution;

Step 3: Setting up a Gender Equality Plan, in which objectives are defined, targets are set, actions and measures to remedy the identified problems are decided, resources and responsibilities are attributed and timelines are agreed upon;

Step 4: Implementing a Gender Equality Plan, in which activities are implemented and outreach efforts are undertaken so as to gradually expand the network of stakeholders;

Step 5: Monitoring progress and evaluating a Gender Equality Plan, with attention to process as well as to progress, accompanying the implementation phase. Findings from the monitoring exercise(s) allow to adjust and to improve interventions, so that their results can be optimised. Evaluating the impact of short-, mid- and long-term transformations is understood as an opportunity to enhance the support to gender equality initiatives. It also paves the way for future, even more resolute actions, and offers a valuable knowledge for their design.

Step 6: What comes after a Gender Equality Plan, in which (based on the evaluation, the findings and progress made), a decision should be made on how to continue the efforts undertaken so far and what a new Gender Equality Plan should address.



Good practices promoting the integration of gender equality into academia and research institutions

During the research phase of the present project, one to three examples of interesting measures that contribute to promote gender equality in research and higher education institutions were identified in each of the EU Member States. The goal was to set **concrete examples that can inspire the work of others throughout the EU**. From the 57 examples identified across the EU Member States, 31 practices with potential were chosen. In an expert consultation meeting held in Vilnius in November 2015, 10 'good practices' were selected. The process to select the good practices comprised:

- Identification of relevant examples at EU Member State level against EIGE's basic criteria to assess good practices
- Consulting stakeholders in an online discussion to define additional qualitative criteria to assess practices with potential
- Definition draft qualitative criteria based on the insights gathered at the online discussion
- Pre-selection of practices with potential
- Organisation of a peer review meeting to decide on a final set of qualitative criteria to assess and select good practices
- Re-working the good practices selected at the peer review meeting

The selected good practices provide insightful and detailed information about initiatives aiming at:

- Raising awareness and building competences of staff involved in recruitment and selection processes
- Ensuring a balanced representation of women and men in decision-making structures
- Rewarding the integration of a gender dimension in research and teaching
- Monitoring and evaluating the institution's progress towards achieving gender equality
- Coordinating and providing support to implement gender equality actions in the institution
- Promoting a gender-integrated leadership programme
- Fostering gender-sensitive practices to support career progression.

More information about the identified practices can be found on the **GEAR action toolbox**.

The positive impact of gender mainstreaming in academia and research institutions

Based on the findings from the national fieldwork at EU Member State level, the following **main impact drivers for effective gender mainstreaming** in research and higher education institutions were identified:

- Senior leadership and management support
- A well-equipped and well-located gender equality body
- Involvement of different categories of stakeholders (inside and outside the organisation)
- Embedment into existing structures and management procedures
- Setting clear targets and practical objectives
- Flexibility and resilience
- Availability of sex-disaggregated data
- Developing competences
- Monitoring and evaluation practices

Promoting institutional changes to achieve gender equality brings benefits at different levels, such as in terms of decision-making procedures, career management schemes, research evaluation procedures, stakeholder cooperation, and research performance. This project concluded that gender equality is understood as essential to the further development in research as well as contributing to the organisation's competitive edge, as regards attracting talents, securing funding, enhancing research quality and the validity of its potential applications. The benefits of gender equality change in research and higher education institutions relate to the organisations' visions of a sustainable society and sustainable growth through research and education.

Nevertheless, **more efforts are still needed** to provide evidence of impact of gender equality initiatives in research and higher education institutions. Institutional changes to achieve gender equality and bringing a gender dimension in research content require a longer timeframe to measure their effectiveness. Both short-term and long-term impacts should be pursued to ensure the mobilisation of research and higher education institutions over time and to make qualitative and quantitative evidence more noticeable. The development of thorough monitoring and evaluation strategies is therefore crucial to link more systematically qualitative and quantitative improvements to the positive impact of gender mainstreaming and show evidence and benefit of the adopted approaches and transformation.

Want to know more?

Visit EIGE's GEAR tool about Gender Equality in Academia and Research:
www.eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/tools-methods/GEAR



ABOUT EIGE

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ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

The information gathered in this publication was developed in cooperation with the European Commission's Directorate-General for Research and Innovation in 2016. Based on national initiatives and projects funded by the EU Framework Programmes for Research and Technological Development, and in consultation with experts and stakeholders, an online tool was designed to assist research and higher education institutions in setting up, implementing, monitoring and evaluating gender equality plans.